Contact: Bill Backous, Program Manager, (360) 407-6699

Program Mission

To provide objective, reliable information about environmental conditions that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the program, inform the public, and help focus the use of limited resources. The program is responsible for monitoring and reporting environmental status, trends, and results to ensure that agency staff, citizens, governments, tribes, and businesses have access to high quality environmental information.

Environmental Threats

Environmental threats include both point and nonpoint sources and range from conventional pollutants, such as fecal coliform bacteria, nutrients, and temperature, to toxic contaminants and invasive aquatic weeds. Most of the Environmental Assessment Program monitoring and investigation efforts focus on threats to water or sediment quality, while many of its directed studies are conducted in support of clients in other agency programs.

The focus of these activities is on objectively assessing existing environmental conditions. The Environmental Assessment Program frequently identifies threats or evaluates cumulative or combined effects stemming from the entire spectrum of environmental threats. Consequently, the program provides relevant and useful information to the agency and other resource management agencies.

Authorizing Laws

- *Federal Clean Water Act*
- *Chapter 90.48 RCW, Water Pollution Control*
- *Chapter 90.70 RCW, Puget Sound Ambient Monitoring Program*
- *Chapter 70.105D RCW, Model Toxics Control Act*
- *Chapter 43.21A RCW, Department of Ecology*

Constituents/Interested Parties

- *Federal and Local Governments*
- *State Agencies*
- *Tribes*
- *Businesses*
- *Environmental Organizations*
- *General Public*
- *Internal Clients*

Major Activities

Quality Assurance and Scientific Assistance

The reliability and integrity of environmental data collected and used by the agency is crucial to the mission of the agency. To help ensure the quality of data, the agency's Quality Assurance Officer and staff: provide guidance and training on developing Quality Assurance Project Plans, review project proposals, and consult on sampling design requirements and interpretation of results.

The Environmental Assessment Program's staff of scientists, modelers, statisticians, chemists, and other environmental specialists frequently assist

other agency personnel by interpreting technical data and supplying information for crucial policy questions. Examples of this scientific assistance include scientific review of agency and grantee reports, as well as technical and engineering analyses to help ensure that water quality permits are based on technically sound evaluations.

Environmental Monitoring
The agency has established a statewide environmental monitoring network to assess the current status of state waters, identify threatened or impaired waters, and evaluate changes (trends) in water quality over time. This network includes sampling stations in rivers, streams, and marine waters (Puget Sound and coastal estuaries). By detecting early changes in water or sediment quality, environmental monitoring allows simpler, less expensive solutions to be applied to emerging problems.

Directed Environmental Studies
The agency conducts studies designed to address known or suspected problems at individual sites or across regional areas. These directed studies span the range from conventional water quality analyses to sampling for toxic chemicals such as dioxins in fish tissues, pesticides in groundwater, or metals in marine sediments. Study results are published in scientific reports used for regulatory decision making, defining policy, and providing a basis for protecting and enhancing environmental health.

Water cleanup studies are a significant example of directed environmental studies. These assessments quantify loading into rivers, lakes, and/or marine waters from cities, industries, farms, and forests. A primary product of these assessments is a calculation of the "total maximum daily load" (TMDL) of a pollutant the waterbody can absorb without causing violations of water quality standards. In keeping with a lawsuit settlement agreement, the agency has agreed to a 12 year schedule to complete water cleanup plans (TMDLs) on more than 1,200 impaired waters statewide.

Laboratory Services
The Manchester Environmental Laboratory (MEL) is a full service environmental chemistry laboratory operated jointly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10 and the Department of Ecology. The laboratory provides technical, analytical, and sampling support for chemistry and microbiology for the agency. MEL is committed to providing the highest quality environmental information to agency resource managers. As part of this commitment, MEL staff provide consultation and training to agency staff on issues related to sampling and laboratory analyses.

Laboratory Accreditation
The agency maintains an environmental laboratory accreditation program that accredits laboratories for water quality analyses and determinations (including sediments and sludges). In September 2002, the agency will begin to accredit drinking water laboratories under a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health. Accreditation helps assure that environmental laboratories have the demonstrated capability to provide accurate and scientifically sound data.

Major Issues

Coordination of Environmental Monitoring Activities
As noted under "Major Activities," environmental monitoring is an important effort of the agency. In recent years, new requirements for watershed planning and salmon recovery have increased the demand for reliable water quality and streamflow data throughout the state.

The agency is one of only several entities conducting environmental monitoring in Washington. Many local governments, tribes, businesses, and environmental organizations also

conduct water quality monitoring programs. In view of the importance of these efforts, the Legislature passed two bills: SSB 5637 (Watershed Health Monitoring and Assessment) and ESHB 1785 (Capital Budget Programs Investing in the Environment) that emphasize the use of monitoring to evaluate watershed health and call for greater coordination among the various agencies and organizations conducting monitoring in the state. The program is actively involved in these efforts to improve the reliability and representativeness of statewide water quality assessments.

Streamflow Monitoring

Streamflow data are lacking in many critical basins and sub-basins throughout Washington. It is important to have accurate and timely information on how much water is flowing in rivers and streams if water is to be effectively managed for instream uses (e.g. fish) and for flood management and protection. The 2001 Legislature provided funding to the agency to install stream-gauging stations in five basins. These stations will deliver continuous and instantaneous flow data for use by water managers. The agency is planning to post near real-time hydrographs from each of the basins on the agency Web site.

Persistent, Bioaccumulative Toxins

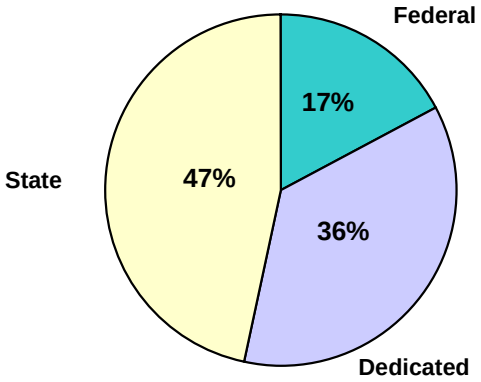
The agency has developed and the Legislature has funded the implementation of a long term strategy designed to reduce persistent, bioaccumulative toxins (PBTs) in Washington's environment over the coming years. PBTs are a particular group of chemicals that can significantly affect the health of humans, fish, and wildlife. This strategy will coordinate agency-wide efforts, engage other key organizations and interest groups, and provide for public education and information on reducing PBTs in the environment.

Environmental Assessment Program Budget

Budget: $18,241,671; Staffing: 107 FTEs

State	($) Amount	Sources	Uses
General Fund - State	8,490,871	Multiple	Water quality monitoring, marine sediment monitoring, streamflow monitoring and technical assistance, monitoring of nonpoint source controls, water cleanup studies, quality assurance, laboratory accreditation
Federal			
General Fund - Federal	3,128,946	Federal grants	Water quality monitoring, marine sediment monitoring, watershed cleanup studies
Dedicated Funds			
General Fund - Private/Local	126,464	Agreements with counties, cities	Water quality studies, laboratory analytical work
State Drought Preparedness Account	564,000	Transfer from Emergency Water Fund	Stream gaging equipment
Water Quality Account	49,000	Excise taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products; sales tax transfer; loan repayments, interest payments; and state general fund transfer	Stream-gauging equipment
State Toxics Control	2,353,648	Hazardous substance tax; remedial actions and penalties recovered	Groundwater investigations, water cleanup studies, toxics monitoring, PBT strategy implementation
Local Toxics Control	18,860	Hazardous substance tax	Laboratory staffing and analytical work
Water Quality Permit	3,329,587	Fees on wastewater discharge permits	Groundwater investigations, water cleanup studies, watershed studies, compliance monitoring
Freshwater Aquatic Weeds	180,295	Fees on boat trailers	Technical assistance, monitoring

EAP Dollars by Fund Source



EAP Dollars by Activity